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### From Meaningless to the Cathartic: Doodling as Art Therapy

**Abstract:** Doodles are the absent-minded scribbles or illustrations that are produced by a person spontaneously. People tend to create doodles often during a long telephone conversation, while sitting in a conference or a class. These doodles/patterns are generally considered absurd or rather meaningless. But beyond the meaningless, absent-minded, non-verbal mental distractions that doodles once were, it now turns out that doodles are actually a form of art therapy knowingly or un-knowingly. Doodling helps your mind to control the deeply held emotions and bring them to surface. It promotes a kind of Catharsis, a purification of one's mind and soul from the emotions stuck in his/her unconscious. Thus from the meaningless to the psychological homeostasis, this paper aims at exploring the evolution of doodles through the years.

**Keywords:** Art therapy, Catharsis, Doodling, Purification.

The word doodle first showed up in the late seventeenth century to denote a fool. The 1936 film 'Mr. Deeds Goes to Town' introduced the word doodler as a name to portray a person who makes absurd designs on paper when they are thinking. Doodles are thus the absentminded drawings by a person when s/he is preoccupied. Though considered meaningless, there is more to understand about them. Studies now reveal the therapeutic effects of Doodles and how they can help a person.

The deliberate use of art as a therapeutic tool is not avant-garde. Art was used as early as in the 7<sup>th</sup> century in hospitals. Psychiatric patients were made to listen to music, stories, watch theatre performances and engage in some kind of art. During the beginning stages of art therapy, doctors also asked the patients to paint images, from which they could discover the pathological problems of the patients and better diagnose the psychosis. In 1922, Hanz Prinzhorn published an important analysis of a collection of drawings made by his psychiatric patients, wherein he observed how drawings were the ‘manifestations of the entire personality of an individual and not only the expression of their pathology’. (Brumat, 2017)

The connections between artworks and the private and collective subconscious were studied upon by Freud and Jung. Carl Jung’s phenomenal book *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature* discusses extensively how artistic creations are intertwined with its psychological roots. Jung believed that while art itself had no inherent meaning, the creative process was something extraordinary. He proposed that works of art arise out of similar conditions as a neurosis.

“Like all neuroses these conscious contents have an unconscious background which in their artistic manifestation often go beyond the individual and into something deeper and more broadly reflective of humankind.” (Dilks, 2014)

When the creative drive works on an artist, the primordial images are withdrawn from his/her collective unconscious, which for Jung, was a truly powerful psychological phenomenon:

“Whoever speaks in primordial images speaks with a thousand voices; he enthral and overpowers, while at the same time he lifts the idea he is seeking to express out of the occasional and the transitory into the realm of the ever-enduring.” (Jung, 82)

Sunni Brown, author of *The Doodle Revolution: Unlock the Power to Think Differently*, proposes that doodling is a deep thinking in disguise. In fact, Brown believes that doodling can even transform the way you think. She redefines doodling and states it to be a tool for problem-solving. From the mindless and meaningless, she transforms its semantic definition to an insightful action.

Any kind of art is a form of purification. Artistic works create various emotions in persons.

“Sometimes the emotions are so strong and intense that the person gets lost within the artistic object abandoning their human nature and blending into the art form. When this happens, the person becomes a victim of self-purification. He/she gets immersed in the cathartic process and when reawakened from this condition, acquires a superior consciousness about themselves and about what occurs to their person.”

(Brumat, 2017)

Similar is the case with doodling. When you start doodling, you tend to forget everything and get totally immersed and lost in the activity, resulting in a purification, and an attainment of a higher self.

Doodling, once defined as the unconscious or unfocused drawings made while otherwise preoccupied, has now evolved to the deliberate drawings and paintings too, more intricate than the regular drawings. It is a kind of escape for some people, a temporary escape from the harsh realities or even an escape from oneself. Doodling is now a purposeful action, more than mindlessness. This cathartic effect of doodles, and its evolution from the absent-minded to the deliberate, clearly explains the sudden inflow and the current emerging trend of adult colouring books and colour therapy.

Conclusion: The cathartic function of doodles is hence crucial and explanatory. When people draw or paint a doodle, consciously or unconsciously, they free themselves of their impulses

and their pent up emotions. They even express their fears and fragilities. Being totally immersed in the act of doodling, they put themselves inside the action. Doodling is hence not just a way to “think differently;” it’s a way to “feel differently,” too, says Malchiodi. She adds,

“The wonderful thing about doodling is that it is a whole brain activity—spontaneous, at times unconscious, self-soothing, satisfying, exploratory, memory-enhancing, and mindful. In essence, doodling can be a self-regulating experience as well as a pleasurable road map of thoughts and ideas.”(2014)

If we consider the role of catharsis as a purgative medicine, doodling clearly acquires a cathartic function in the person it is done by.

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